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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [SNAR](#) [EC](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: CORREA AND VP RATCHET UP RHETORIC ON COLOMBIAN
FUMIGATION, FM MODERATES THE MESSAGE

Classified By: PolOff James Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During a visit to the border region on February 14, President Rafael Correa announced he had ordered the Ecuadorian Air Force to intercept planes violating Ecuadorian air space on its northern border with Colombia. Correa's announcement does not represent a change in GOE policy, but is disturbing for its bellicosity and timing, coming after the GOC has confirmed an end to aerial coca fumigation in the border region. Correa's attitude was echoed by Vice President Lenin Moreno's comments on the need for Colombia to distance itself from American coca spraying programs during his recent visit to Caracas. By upping the rhetorical ante for no apparent reason, Ecuador's leaders have complicated efforts by Foreign Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa to improve relations with Bogota. End Summary.

Correa's Blast

¶2. (SBU) During a visit to the border region on February 14, President Correa declared he had ordered the Ecuadorian Air Force to intercept any aircraft violating Ecuadorian air space. In a statement issued by the Presidential Palace, Correa declared "we will not permit another violation of Ecuadorian air space by planes that are not even Colombian, but American." The statement also declared the government's intention to create a "Plan Ecuador," to counterbalance Plan Colombia, which Correa cites as being responsible for the violence that is plaguing the Ecuador-Colombia frontier. During his border visit, Correa offered to assist authorities and indigenous populations of the Sucumbios region, whom he claims are suffering at the hands of this "Colombian aggression."

VP Chimes In from Caracas

¶3. (SBU) Vice President Lenin Moreno chimed in the same day from Caracas, where he was conducting an official visit accompanied by ministers responsible for social services and was reportedly received by President Chavez. Moreno reportedly expressed astonishment that Colombia would continue to treat "a brother nation so unfairly while following the orders of the Empire (read USG)." Moreno also said the matter of adverse health effects from GOC fumigation near the border with Ecuador would be brought before the Hague tribunal, to ensure that Ecuadorian victims will be justly compensated. Moreno's press advisor claimed to us

when we called to clarify and express concern that Moreno's off-the-cuff comments had been "inflated" by the press and that he recognized that in the confused press scrum he had chosen his words poorly. Moreno also reportedly expressed admiration for many of Venezuela's medical and educational initiatives and said he was "exploring the possibility" of reproducing them in Ecuador.

Foreign Minister More Diplomatic

¶4. (SBU) Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Espinosa used more diplomatic language on the fumigation issue, expressing GOE desire to reach a "definitive and comprehensive" agreement with Colombia that would create a permanent framework for handling the fumigation issue. Espinosa noted that each time a new fumigation plan is formulated, new agreements need to be hashed out, causing some frustration on all sides. Espinosa highlighted the work of the Joint Colombian-Ecuadorian commission that is currently working out a comprehensive agreement and reiterated the commissions main objectives: to create a system of verification of damage along the border and in Ecuador's northern provinces, take testimony from affected persons and to prepare terms of reference for a United Nations study of the health effects of spraying. Espinosa said the GOE valued good relations with Ecuador's neighbors, despite the contentious issues that currently exist.

Comment

¶5. (C) The president and vice president's unfortunate statements serve only to inflame public opinion on both sides of the border, and could be intended to placate frustrated

border residents and anti-American elements in Ecuador. We believe Correa's bluster is mostly nationalist bluff, intended mainly for internal consumption, but note that Correa likes to play the heavy and let his ministers clean up the mess. His order does not actually represent a change in GOE policy--the Palacio government had also declared a policy of interception, and Correa reaffirmed rather than changed it (and did not escalate it by ordering that errant aircraft be shot down). Regardless, we will use upcoming opportunities to make USG displeasure clear to the GOE, and encourage a more private diplomacy between the two neighbors.

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